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ABSTRACT

Many British colleges of further education are moving toward a more flexible and learner-centered curriculum. Pressures for these changes are both internal and external: the colleges' funding methodology encourages student retention and achievement, and being flexible is now an economic necessity for many colleges. This two-part paper first looks at the issues facing colleges that may be considering modularizing some or all of their programs in an effort to provide more flexibility. These issues include the following: the reasons for modularizing (such as providing access to education, increasing learner autonomy, and expanding into new markets); designing a modular program; managing change; staff development; and addressing other institutional needs. The second part of the paper is a case study looking at Barnsley College (England)--how it funded and introduced a highly successful and innovative flexible curriculum and is evolving into a learning rather than a teaching institution. The paper contains 21 references. (KC)

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Putting the learner first: support through flexible learning

Jean Bolton

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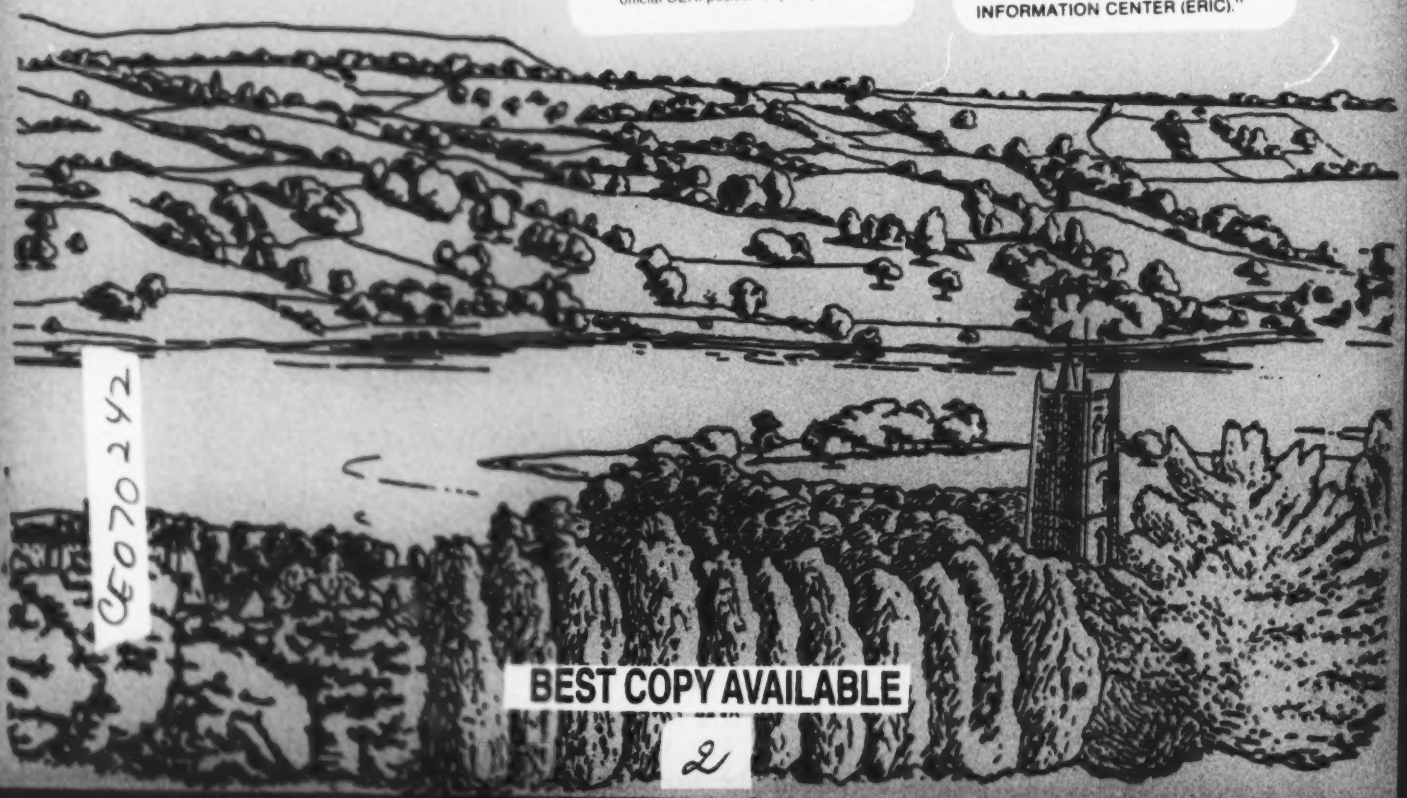

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Jean Bolton

The Staff College

MP 073

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Mendip Papers

Putting the learner first: support through flexible learning

Jean Bolton

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INTRODUCTION

Many colleges are moving towards a more flexible and learner-centred curriculum. Pressures for change are both internal and external. The FEFC's funding methodology encourages student retention and achievement. Being flexible is now an economic necessity for many colleges.

This paper is in two parts. The first looks at the issues facing colleges who may be considering modularising some or all of their provision in an effort to provide more flexibility of provision.

The second part is a case study looking at Barnsley College – how it funded and introduced a highly successful and innovative flexible curriculum and is evolving into a learning rather than a teaching institution.

PART 1: MODULAR COURSE PROVISION

Editor's note: This paper was originally published as a conference paper and delivered in Szczecin, Poland.

What is a module?

The term 'module' is regularly used, but what does it actually mean?

There are many ways of defining a module within a learning context. A module can defined in terms of assessment procedures (e.g. under direct observation or production of written evidence), delivery/time

(e.g. the module will run for one and a half hours per week for 12 weeks), or learning outcome/content (e.g. the student should be able to explain the need for and methods of computer security, to quote a SCOTVEC example).

One early definition was given by B and M Goldschmid (1972):

> An autonomous, independent entity in a planned series of learning activities designed to help the student to attain certain clearly defined objectives.

Whichever definition is used, modules must be organised in terms of output (i.e. learning) rather than input (i.e. teaching) and should have the following elements and characteristics:

- a structured content;
- the learning context and an indication of pre-requisites;
- aims and objectives;
- a learner guide or route way so that the student knows the level, learning methodology and mode of delivery;
- assessment procedures;
- progression paths;
- ability to be assessed and accredited singly;
- can be accumulated towards a terminal qualification;
- recognition by national validating bodies;
- set at an appropriate level;
- include learning tasks that emphasis practical application of skills and knowledge.

Why modularise a course/the curriculum?

The philosophy behind the modularity of course design is that teaching and learning activities can be quantified and measured. FE colleges are increasingly needing to define their success in terms of outcomes rather than inputs (e.g. how many learners achieve success in a given qualification or how much added value has been gained by the individual learner). A modular curriculum can help them to achieve measurable outcomes on an on-going basis, as integrated in the design of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs). Modular courses can introduce flexibility into an inflexible system, reduce costs or increase responsiveness to learners' needs. The central rationale is that learners concentrate on and achieve short-term goals, thus improving participation and motivation.

Modules can serve many functions resulting in the establishment ensuring more flexibility in its provision. Modules can be:

- part of a linear progressed learning programme;
- a servicing module;
- an optional element for a mainstream course;
- part of an entitlement curriculum;
- a core skills module underpinning a mainstream programme;
- part of personal interest/lifelong learning for all.

A module usually consists of three sections:

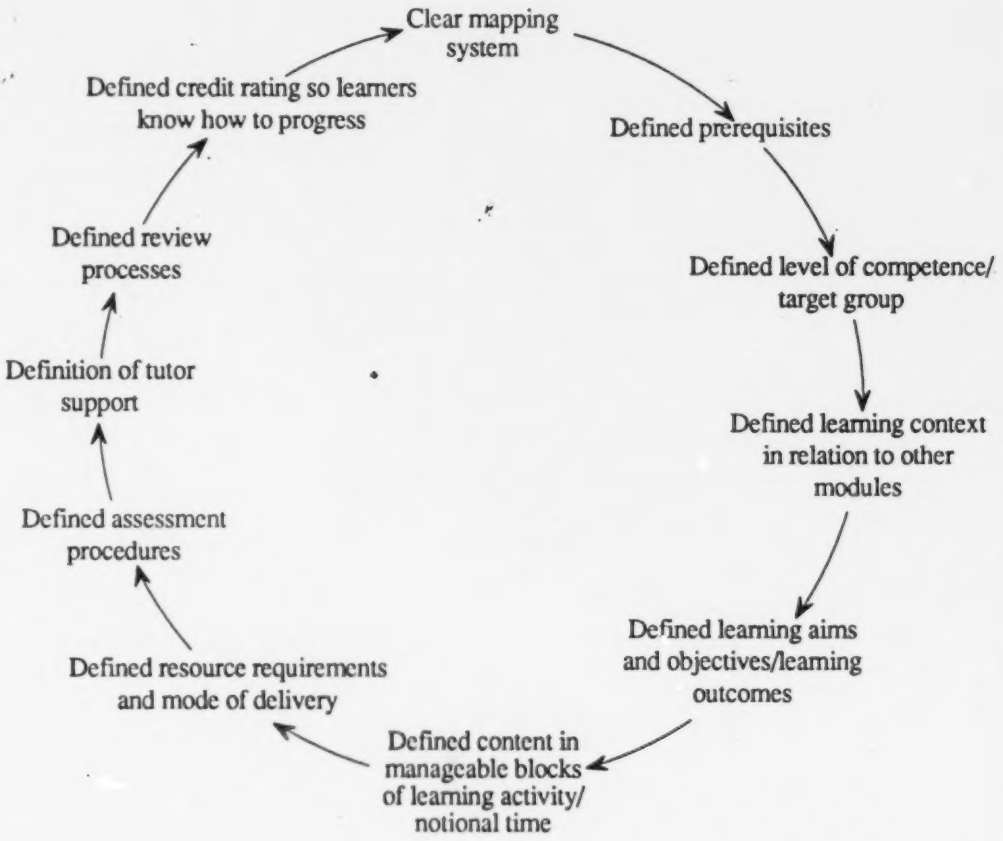
- **an entry system** which guides the learner through the most appropriate route, incorporating diagnostic assessment and support;
- **the module** itself, which defines and describes the learning, aims and objectives, contents, etc.
- **an exit system** which continues to route the learner to the next educational step.

Each module has the following components (see **Figure 1**).

These small units of learning and assessment are the building blocks towards building up a completed programme of learning.

Before discussions take place on module content, an institution needs to look at the wider implications of modularisation. What are the reasons for

Figure 1: Module components


Clear mapping system
Defined prerequisites
Defined level of competence/ target group
Defined learning context in relation to other modules
Defined learning aims and objectives/learning outcomes
Defined content in manageable blocks of learning activity/ notional time
Defined resource requirements and mode of delivery
Defined assessment procedures
Definition of tutor support
Defined review processes
Defined credit rating so learners know how to progress

modularising the curriculum? What will the benefits be both to the institution and the learners?
These benefits obviously vary but the main ones can be summarised as:

- *Clear access and exit routes.*
  Learners have clear entry and exit points within the programme. Opportunities for study, assessment and accreditation are clearly visible.

- *Increased learner autonomy.*
  Learners have increased control over the pace and timescale of their learning programme. This dismantles 'time serving' and repetition of knowledge and experience previously gained. However, one of the implications of this is that as learners are given greater responsibility for managing their own learning, they need increased training and support in such areas as study skills and time management if they are to be successful.

- *Expansion into new markets.*
  A variety of learners can access a menu of opportunities to suit their own needs and a range of clients can be catered for simultaneously, e.g. a full-time 16–19 year old student may gain modules alongside a mature, employed learner who wishes to access part of the qualification in a limited time.

- *Credit accumulation can be over a period of time, not necessarily in a linear progression.*
  Modules become building blocks to

qualifications and can be built upon at will using roll-on, roll-off provision.

- *Modules can be delivered and studied in a variety of modes.*
  Learners may wish to be taught in a group for one module, gain another via open and distance learning methods and use learning workshops to help them gain the competences for a further module. Again, this improves access as learners can learn throughout the year, not just in a set, traditional time structure.

- *Increased coherence and flexibility.*
  Modularisation allows learners to plan their own individual learning route, which may include the accreditation of prior learning (APL) to enable them to 'fast track' to qualifications.

- Modular structures may be a focus for developments in increasing flexibility within institutions, providing an entitlement curriculum and a responsive service to a variety of clients and their needs.

Designing a modular programme

There are many issues to be addressed when designing a modular curriculum, not least of which in ensuring a coherent rather than a fragmented experience for both learners and staff. Thus, the design of a modular programme has to aim to achieve clarity, relevance and a coherency of approach, to ensure continuity of the learning experience.

Resourcing is another issue. Historically, college resources have been devolved to departments or sections who can jealously guard their territorial rights. This may result in a loss of efficiency across an institution, as when whole or part learning programmes are repeated across college, thus duplicating staffing and materials costs.

At times it may be appropriate to look at merging groups of learners across sessions in a week, enabling small group work or individual one-to-one sessions to take place at other times. Modularisation can help this process by looking at commonality across learning programmes, in core skills for example, and delivering them in a variety of ways to students across departments or sections. Such a move could save time in materials production and staffing costs, increase flexibility of provision, and bring about changes in staff attitudes to the planning and sharing of learning resources.

It may also be that different learning programmes at the same level receive differing amounts of staffing time with all the implications of inequality which follow as a result. Modularising the provision involves timetabling to enable a common time grid across college so that learning programmes at the same level receive similar amounts of staff time. This may free up students to gain access to other qualifications, in addition to their primary learning goal.

Managing change

Once institutions have looked at the benefits (or lack of them) that modularisation can bring, they then need to look at *why* they wish to change. Is it to bring them up to date with other colleges? Make them more efficient? Make them more responsive to client needs? They also need to look at how they will bring about this change – how will it be made effective initially and then embedded into working practices?

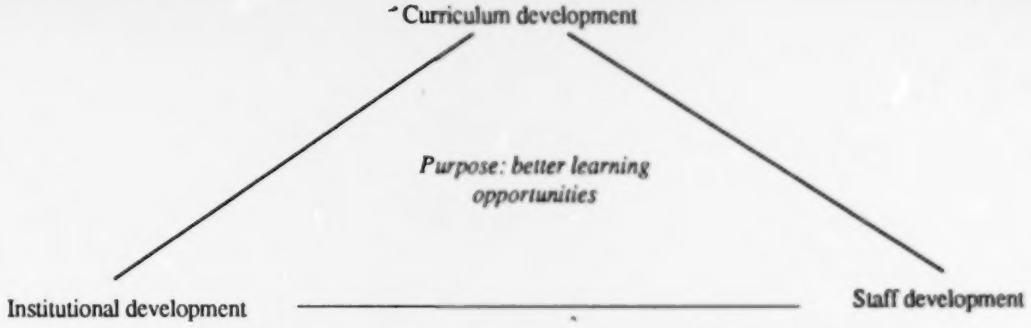
As in any change model, change must:

- be owned not imposed;
- be understood, supported and promoted by the management team;
- be part of a shared vision of the way forwards;
- be seen as opening up new opportunities for both staff and learners;
- not make staff feel vulnerable and threatened.

Other factors need to be taken into consideration and progress made on a variety of broad fronts (see **Figure 2**).

Staff development is obviously the prime vehicle for raising awareness of the need to change, but it must be supported by changes in the organisation, i.e. by addressing resourcing, timetabling and

Figure 2: title needed



Source: Further Education Unit (1989) **Towards a framework for curriculum entitlement.**

curriculum issues. For change to be successful there needs to be:

- a shared vision of future developments across the establishment;
- clarity about what needs to change;
- a policy or plan of how to achieve that change;
- a statement of new objectives;
- action plans for individuals/teams;
- adequate resources;
- appropriate additional training based on a training needs analysis.

There needs to be extensive discussion and collaboration in order to prepare the groundwork before implementation. Thought must be given to how the proposed changes will affect other systems within the institution. For example, a modular structure may affect:

- management information systems (timetabling, recording of achievement, administrative support);
- central admissions systems;
- pastoral/tutorial support systems;
- guidance and counselling provisions;
- teaching/delivery systems;
- strategies for staff training and development.

Staff development

Staff development is of prime importance. A move towards a flexible modular curriculum involves changes in the teacher's role. These changes are a result of the way in which the totality of the learning experience has been reviewed and amended. As the emphasis is placed on learning rather than teaching, so staff have to reconsider the organisation of a learning programme and its necessary components, i.e. large group work, small group work, practical assessment sessions, tutorials and workshop support.

Increasingly, staff are becoming 'qualification route managers' who help learners to achieve the qualification in the most appropriate way. They may:

- advise on the accreditation of prior learning;
- act as guidance/careers advisers to plan progression routes;
- act as personal tutors, to help the learner produce a realistic action plan;
- negotiate the actual learning programme and its delivery mode;
- assess the competence of the learner against national standards;
- above all, translate the jargon and terms of modularisation into practical reality for the learner.

Academic staff are no longer just defined in terms of their class contact, i.e. teaching groups of students over a period of time. They now need to plan approaches such as flexible learning and directed private study into a personal learning route for each individual. They may also have to consider which medium is the most appropriate to use – video, computer, multimedia – and take that into consideration when planning integrated, valid and cost-effective assessment methods. It may be that staff require training in:

- guidance skills;
- module design skills;
- writing flexible learning materials;
- team building skills;
- tutorial skills including action planning and recording of achievement;
- APL techniques;
- assessment skills;
- organisational skills such as flexible timetabling.

Time will be well spent in quantifying these needs through a training needs analysis (TNA) and then working towards fulfilling them as it will ensure staff feel in control of the process and thus better able to solve problems as they arise.

Modules, like other curriculum innovations, require not only leadership but debate and the developments of staff consensus. Staff need time to absorb new ideas, opportunity for reflection and training and then to gain confidence through manageable innovation. There is evidence that some modular schemes may have been introduced 'over-hastily'.

Addressing other institutional needs

What then are the services that need to be in place to underpin an effective modular curriculum? Staff development needs have already been taken into consideration but what else is required to ensure success? What range of appropriate infrastructures? The following are suggested:

- guidance and counselling systems;
- tutorial systems;
- action planning/recording of achievement services;
- administrative services;
- management information services, including student tracking;
- assessment services;
- learning support services;
- open and distance learning modes of delivery supported by an appropriate range of materials.

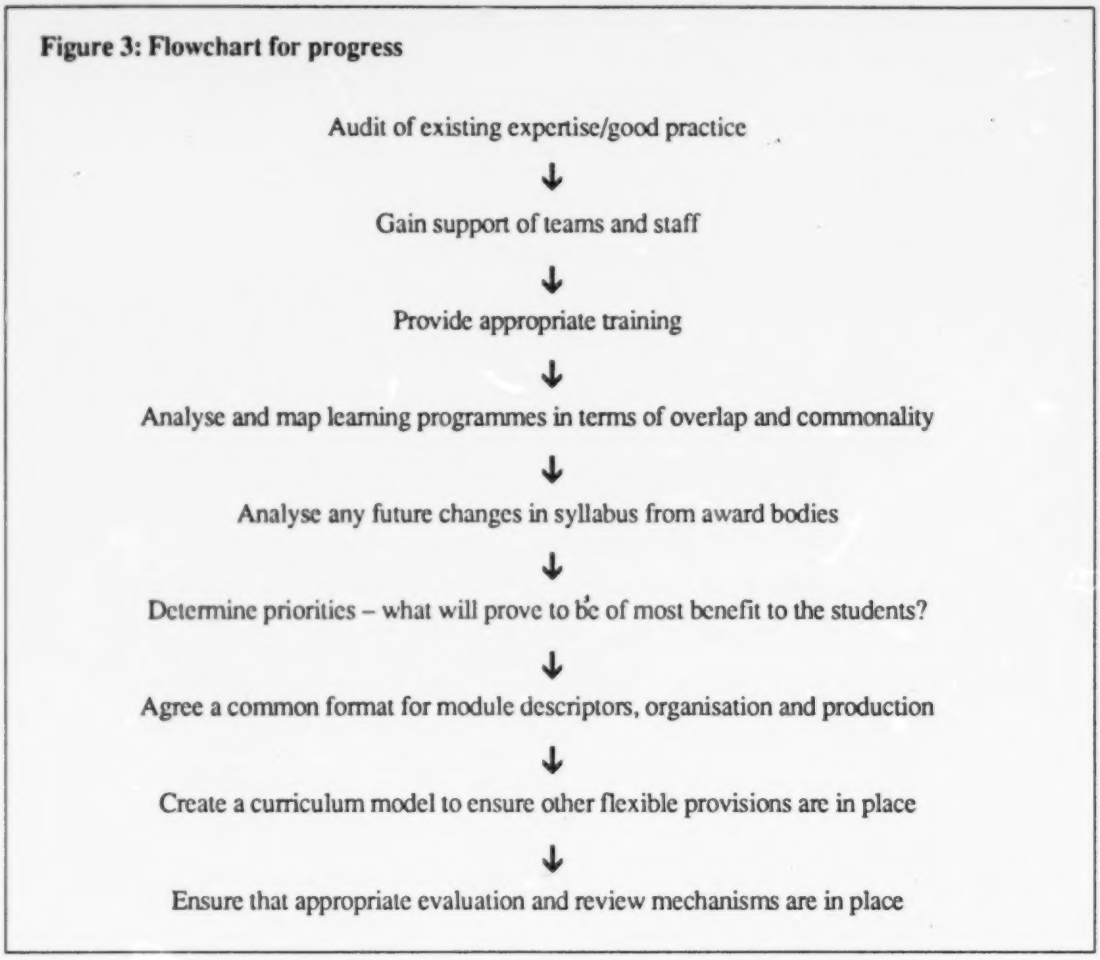
All these need to be integrated so that, as far as the learner is concerned, she or he receives the most appropriate service. It is not always necessary to move away from the more traditional taught class as long as there is planned provision for individual progression in terms of the pace, time and place of learning.

When establishments first begin to consider modularising a curriculum, they should ask themselves the following questions:

- Is the learning programme to be wholly or partly modularised?
- Should the programme be new or built upon an existing one?
- Should an existing programme be supported by a range of supporting modules and then gradually modularised or vice versa?
- Will the modules be used via individual open or distance learning or by group sessions?

It may be that when an institution fully investigates or audits the amount of work that has already been done in this area, it is pleasantly surprised. One way forward is suggested in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3: Flowchart for progress


Audit of existing expertise/good practice
Gain support of teams and staff
Provide appropriate training
Analyse and map learning programmes in terms of overlap and commonality
Analyse any future changes in syllabus from award bodies
Determine priorities – what will prove to be of most benefit to the students?
Agree a common format for module descriptors, organisation and production
Create a curriculum model to ensure other flexible provisions are in place
Ensure that appropriate evaluation and review mechanisms are in place

Conclusion

In summary, modularisation (the process by which the curriculum is reconstructed into modules of delivery or assessment) can bring about developments in access and credit accumulation, and can open up new markets. However, other elements of the flexible provision need to be in place to support and underpin this curriculum development. Staff development and training is of prime importance to ensure a productive team-working approach to auditing and mapping the curriculum. The recognition of commonality and overlap can result in efficiency gains for the institution and enable it to respond more effectively to changes in client demands.

Educational establishments are continuing to move towards being learning rather than teaching establishments; away from the tradition pattern of provision which has been provider-centred to one that is learner-centred. Modularisation helps them to further this process.

PART 2: FLEXIBLE PROVISION AT BARNSLEY COLLEGE

Editor's note: This section was previously published as a case study in Towards lifelong learning. *(Staffordshire Open Learning Unit.)*

Barnsley College was formed in September 1990 by the amalgamation of three colleges – a sixth form college, a college of arts and a college of technology. It is a tertiary college being the major provider of post-16 education in Barnsley. The four main sites, near the town centre, are within walking distance of each other, and together with a number of outposts, make up the 11 sites the college owns. It is a large college, offering a wide portfolio of over 800 courses ranging from agriculture to hair and beauty; it has 7250 FTEs (full-time equivalent students) and approximately 16,000 enrolments.

The move towards flexibility

The college's mission statement states (amongst other items): 'We aim to be a nationally recognised leader in the provision of education and training for the post-16 community by ... providing more opportunities for education and training at all levels, improving success rates and raising achievement levels.'

Central to Barnsley College's mission statement are the two desires to increase the availability of learning opportunities for our community and to raise achievement levels. It was the determination to realise these desires rather than any belief in major efficiency gains which led the college to increase substantially its commitment to flexible learning. It may be possible in the long-term to demonstrate major efficiency gains from the introduction of flexible learning. Indeed, given the emphasis that the funding methodology introduced by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) places upon retention and achievement, such proof may be possible sooner rather than later. It does appear to be the case that flexible learning introduced within a structured and supportive framework has a major affect in persuading 'marginal' students to stay the course rather than drop out.

It was recognised that if flexible learning provision was to be made available in a meaningful way, there would need to be a large investment, both one-off capital funding and on-going recurrent funding, if the objectives of increasing non-traditional learner groups, flexibility of provision, and implementing an integrated personal and learning support system for all clients, were to be achieved.

It was this recognition that persuaded the college management to follow a radical course of action in top-slicing the college budget by 15 per cent in May 1992. This provided the funding necessary to introduce large-scale flexible learning provision.

Senior management direction

Reading this the facts slip by easily but the reality was very different. Once the commitment to flexible provision had been made by senior management, systems had to be set in place to deal with resources, accommodation and staff development. All full-time vocational learning programmes would be top-sliced by 15 per cent. This money, which included both staffing and materials costs, would then be used to develop flexible learning right across the college. Barnsley College, like many other institutions, had already experimented with workshops for maths and English and, though performing a very worthwhile function, they had had a marginal effect on the rest of the institution. The proposed changes went much further and involved the organisation of learning programmes in all areas of the college.

Accommodation changes

So what did we do following May 1992? Over that summer, the top floor of the former sixth form college and an old hall in the arts college were converted into learning centres. In addition, walls were knocked down to create a CAD/CAM suite of rooms on another site. On yet another site, an IT learning centre/base was created, again by knocking down walls to create a larger area.

All of these large spaces were carpeted, curtained, furnished with new tables and chairs where required, and given computers and technology equipment. When the majority of staff returned after the summer break, they found new 'spaces', the use of which meant adjusting their approaches to teaching and learning. Without these changes in accommodation,

which were a symbol of the senior management's support, the changes in teaching and learning would have been more difficult if not impossible.

For the first time we had a cross-college, cross-site mechanism, which delivered the same service to all student groups. It allowed any student to access the college's support structure at a variety of points across the week and across sites. It was here that the learner could go if s/he wanted to find out about careers, UCAS applications, finance, information on college courses and learning support.

Attitudinal changes

The learning centres also incorporate the libraries and librarians into a learning support system. Learners can come to the learning centres, find a book or a CD-ROM or find out how to use a computer to word process their assignment all in the same place. We have tried to move towards the concept of serving the client so that when someone asks for information in a learning centre, if they need to talk to someone more often that not the member of staff comes to them rather than vice versa. This reduced the familiar scene of would-be students wandering around corridors, hoping for guidance and not being able to access it.

Cross-college staff development programme

While co-ordinating the resourcing and accommodation was time-consuming and necessary, the most important aspect was dealing with staff – their fears and insecurities that such a massive change engenders. Staff are often very fearful about change and need to be reassured that the implementation of flexible learning will not mean that their role becomes redundant. That was the major anxiety – that if new centres were introduced, filled with computers and open and flexible learning materials, academic staff roles would be minimised or the quality of the learning experience for their students would suffer.

We drew up a short staff development programme, supported by an open learning pack for support and reference which was the delivered across the sites, across the week and across the days, during May and June. This programme aimed to allow staff to voice their fears about the projected changes and give them reassurances and strategies for coping. Our message was very simple: we trust your expertise as professionals, we recognise that there is a wealth of good practice already in existence within Barnsley College that may not be recognised as flexible learning, we offer a very broad definition of flexible learning, and we ask what support is required to enable staff to perform their jobs even better than they do already, incorporating flexible learning initiatives.

We also ensured that we listened closely to what teams and members of staff actually wanted. Some required banks of materials, others, development in writing flexible learning, others required hardware and software. As far as possible (budget allowing) we tried to meet these requests.

Part of the rationale behind the top-slicing was that 50 per cent would go towards the development of *learning centres*, which dealt with information, advice and guidance across the college. The other 50 per cent would go towards *learning bases*, which dealt with flexibility in the vocational areas. Thus the unit of resource was ploughed back into developing certain areas, with priorities being decided by the sections themselves via flexible learning committees. In the first year we developed learning bases in CAD/CAM, information technology, office skills, social care, electronics and languages. Since then learning bases have been developed in health studies, health and beauty, catering, business and management, science, higher education, construction, music technology, art and design, sports studies and extra information technology.

Re-appraisal of the curriculum

Staff now have to take a variety of factors into consideration when planning their programme provision: taught time, learning centre time, learning base time, tutorial provision and supported self study. All have to be plaited together into one coherent and integrated whole, which at times has to be amended in the light of such curriculum developments as GNVQs – for which Barnsley College was one of the pilot colleges.

There have been difficulties, obviously. One of them was that in that first year both students and staff were new to the concept and had to 'feel their way' in terms of organisation. In May 1993, at the end of the first year, a conference on flexible learning was organised within the college, with the keynote speech being given by the chief executive, followed by sessions led by practitioners within the college. This proved to be the turning point. Staff could now recognise their skills, realise how much progress they had made and share their ideas with colleagues. New flexible models of timetabling, staffing and organisation were disseminated, and list of staff development needs was drawn up. Support sessions were then planned and implemented in response to those needs.

Both the learning centres and the learning bases were implemented as part of a recognition that colleges need to become learning centres focused on meeting learner needs. This means that colleges must offer a wide range of opportunities within a coherent framework allowing for the acquisition of core and transferable skills, a choice (and variety) of attendance patterns and learning style with access to knowledge, application and skills-based learning as appropriate, alongside assessment systems that promote achievement rather than emphasise failure. The whole of this offer has to be subject to meaningful quality review and evaluation, not for its own sake but to ensure that action is taken to improve the quality continuously.

Increased levels of resources

The facilitation and development of autonomous leaning in students does not happen overnight. Considerable support is required not only in the transitional initial stages but also later for, as students grow more confident about their learning, they also grow more specific in their demands. The college needed, therefore, to improve and increase both its physical (accommodation, equipment, materials) and human resources, particularly staff involved in counselling, guidance, advice and support of students within a flexible learning system. The enhancement of these resources plays a key role in the implementation of the empowerment strategies which are central to the college's mission.

Re-appraisal of staff roles

Over the years, there has been and continues to be, a refining and recognition of the roles of staff within the delivery of flexible learning systems. One of the major successes of the changes has been the integration of the library staff into the learning support staff. The librarians themselves are the managers of the learning centres. They have an overview of resources, staffing and students. As a team, they make recommendations regarding future policy. They work closely with a variety of staff, including clerical support officers, academic staff as duty tutors, and academic staff as action planning/ review tutors. Another of the successes has been the resulting integration of tutorial provision and learning support, as review sessions actually take place in the learning centre, with immediate access to careers and core skills advice and support.

Developments in flexible learning initiatives have resulted in a clarification of the role of academics – as learning managers who negotiate and assess a learning programme. Alongside them are learning facilitators who work to the learning managers and who help to support the learners. The college is now running a TEC-funded 'training the facilitators' project to fulfil the need for well-trained staff; but an interesting offshoot of this development has been the recognition of an overall team ethos in which every individual's part is recognised, with the provision of a quality, corporate response. We are all there to serve the needs of the learner as best we can. The teams themselves, which may be drawn from representatives across the college structure, are currently setting their own quality standards and performance indicators. All are reviewing their roles as a matter of course.

A significant facet of flexible learning is the emphasis on resources; these may be paper- or computer-based. In Barnsley College, a flexible learning officer has been appointed to enhance and encourage the production of flexible learning materials across the college. The officer works closely with staff from all the areas in college and helps them to amend existing material, or produce new material in response to student need. By liaising closely with a design and printing unit within college, which helps to produce material to an

extremely high standard in-house, the officer has been able to minimise costs and waiting times. The college has produced the award-winning open learning package **Which way now?**, which helps learners to assess their future career and learning choices; the **Opportunities for you** package, which take students through the UCAS applications; a GNVQ support pack, which deals with recording achievement; distance learning programmes in GCSE and A level English; and a variety of other internal programmes.

To address the issue of computer-based resources, the college has appointed a learning technologies unit, which appraises the users' needs and gives advice on hardware and software. Over the past three years, 350 machines have been bought and networked for use in the learning centres. Students have a menu of software applications that they can access such as word processing, databases, spreadsheets, cv writing and CD-ROMs. They are available to all students at any time the learning centres are open. Learners are now actively encouraged to use computers to produce assignments integrating, for example, spreadsheets and thus provide evidence of core skills requirements.

All students are issued annually with a 'Tracker Pack©' floppy disk which incorporates national award-winning action planning software developed within the college. This program is disk-bound which means learners can access any one of the computers in the learning centres or learning bases to record their short- and long-term goals and print out their record of achievement. The personal development, empowerment and autonomy of the learner are encouraged and supported through Tracker Pack© and the infrastructure of support across learning centres, bases and the continuously developing tutorial framework. This development by itself has also been a major influence on how learners, including adults, regard the use of computers. They approach them with much less fear and with much greater appreciation.

Another development involving computers has been the use of the OLAF (Open Learning Administrators' Friend). All students are issued with a college card with a bar code which records all their personal details. As they come into the learning centres and learning bases, they swipe in (and swipe out on exit) using their college cards and this records their attendance. From this can be extrapolated details and patterns of attendance: a valuable aid in planning staffing levels.

Development in the role of learning centres

An interesting feature for those involved in flexible learning is to watch how it is constantly changing in the light of new demands. Barnsley College is no exception to this, and is perhaps more responsive than most. The learning centres themselves are changing – from being initially centres for information and guidance to centres that deliver short flexible learning courses and tutorial support. Duty tutors are now seen as being extremely important to the future of the college in that they can give impartial advice on all the college's provision rather than simply guiding learners to their own subject areas and will enable the learner to access the most appropriate person within the institution. In the light if the FEFC's guidelines, this role becomes even more central. These duty tutors are currently being trained towards the D36 unit of the TDLB Awards, to enable them to advise on APL where appropriate. They will also offer tutorial support for a variety of short open learning programmes which will enable access to their own programme are. They serve a variety of functions, both general and specialist, all of which result in an up-skilling rather than a deskilling of staff.

Core skill support

The learning centres are now seen as the providers of learning support for core skills. Of particular importance in GNVQs, core skills are encouraged to occur naturally in the learning programme, yet there are times when a learner needs extra practice or cannot easily gain access to that particular skill within a vocational context. They and their tutor can turn to core skills teams to ensure that the full range of evidence is gained. This is recorded on the student's Tracker Pack©.

A complete flexible, modular framework of core skills has been accredited through the South Yorkshire Open College Federation (SYOCF) for all those students within college who are not

studying GNVQs. However, this framework follows the national standards set by GNVQs.

General access points (GAPs)

There have also been changes in the definition of what is seen as a learning centre. These now exist in a variety of places – in a local library, a community centre, a school. In Barnsley they are called GAPs – general access points – and there are 10 of them scattered across the borough. They serve as mini learning centres for learners, primarily adults, who would find it difficult to access the central provision. They offer a variety of programmes, with the underlying ethos that these 'tasters' will encourage learners to take up the college's provision at a later date when it is appropriate for their individual needs.

Funded through the European 'Rechar' fund, they have proved to be a great success both with clients and the college. By their very existence, they help to promote and encourage greater flexibility of response to the community's requirements.

Saturday college

It was this desire to increase the availability of learning opportunities that led to the implementation of 'Saturday college' on January 1994. The learning centre provision, and a major college site, are open on Saturday mornings for those who want to study, use the facilities such as the computers, take a short course themselves or encourage their children to do so. Response so far has been very encouraging, with this provision reaching learners who would not ordinarily think of using the college.

Guidance programmes

One of the classes of Saturday college is that called 'Career exploration class'. This has been developed within the college as part of an FEU guidance project. It builds upon the APL **Which way now?** programme, by offering group sessions for those learners who are unsure about their future career choice, and also about their future programmes. It is planned to continue this provision over the summer, after the project is finished, as staff consider this to be a valuable part of the college's portfolio – enabling the community of Barnsley to gain access to the most appropriate part of Barnsley College's provision.

Summary

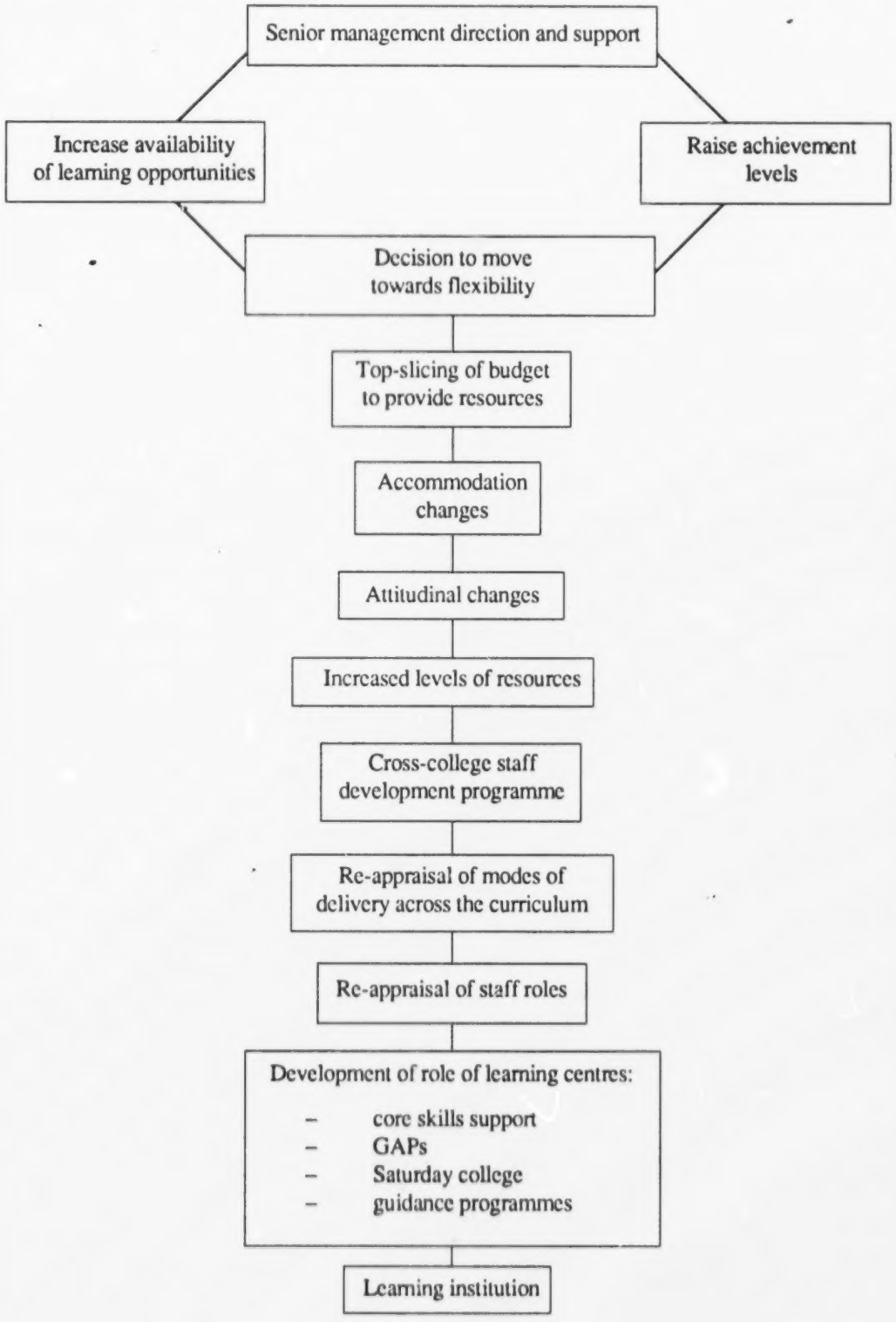
In summary, the developments in flexible learning and learning support have come about largely as a result of clear senior management direction and support. The top-slicing mechanism funded the necessary changes in accommodation and resourcing but, as stated previously, this funding needs to be on-going and takes a great deal of co-ordination.

Towards a learning institution

All of these changes would have been unsuccessful is staff development on a massive scale had not taken place to provide the reassurance and framework needed. This staff development is on-going and underpins the whole of the development. There have been changes in staffing, but hopefully these will not be seen as cost cutting or efficiency savings. The basis for the model of Barnsley College's approach to flexible learning involved recognising the value of a wide variety of staff within the learning process, all having a clear commitment to providing a high quality customer service. It is this fundamental attitudinal change that is the most exciting; its permeation has changed staff attitudes to our learners.

We are now a servicing institution, putting the clients' needs first. In the process we are finally moving towards being a learning, rather than a teaching, institution – much more flexible in our response to our local community.

Figure 4: Flexible provision at Barnsley College – progress chart


Senior management direction and support
Increase availability of learning opportunities
Raise achievement levels
Decision to move towards flexibility
Top-slicing of budget to provide resources
Accommodation changes
Attitudinal changes
Increased levels of resources
Cross-college staff development programme
Re-appraisal of modes of delivery across the curriculum
Re-appraisal of staff roles
Development of role of learning centres:
– core skills support
– GAPs
– Saturday college
– guidance programmes
Learning institution

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